A Guide for Teachers and Students in a Cross-Cultural Context
A Guide for Teachers and Students in a Cross-cultural Context addresses important aspects of cross-cultural education primarily in relation to China and Sweden though much of what is written here also applies to other nationalities. Our observations are based in part on our experience of teaching Chinese students both in China and in Sweden and on six workshops held at Linnaeus University, Sweden, Kristianstad University, Sweden, and Beijing Normal University, China.

Our handbook is divided into three sections: practical information; oral interaction in the cross-cultural classroom; and writing in the cross-cultural classroom. The three sections point to potential problems and misunderstandings between China and Sweden and provide practical advice and tips for students and teachers.

We welcome Chinese and other international students to Kristianstad University. They enrich our classrooms and stimulate new thinking as well as new teaching practices. It is our hope that readers of our handbook will contact us, providing comments and suggesting additions to the three sections. All comments and suggestions can be sent by e-mail to the contributors.

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Kristianstad, November 2014,

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INTRODUCTION

This guide addresses important aspects of cross-cultural education primarily in relation to China and Sweden, though much of what is written here also applies to other nationalities. Our observations are based in part on our experience of teaching Chinese students both in China and in Sweden, and of teaching international students from a variety of countries studying at Kristianstad University. The section on writing takes as its starting point the problems addressed at six writing workshops sponsored by The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) held at Kristianstad University, Sweden, Linnaeus University, Sweden and Beijing Normal University, China between 8 May and 4 June 2014. The overall goal was to enhance awareness of differences between the academic writing cultures of China and the other countries represented at Kristianstad University, including England, France, Germany, Korea, Romania, Spain, Turkey, the Netherlands and the Ukraine.

The first two workshops focused on providing concrete examples of assignments that Swedish teachers work with in order to enhance students’ understanding of dimensions of academic writing that are not immediately apparent and are seldom articulated in explicit instructions, including, for example, how secondary sources function in the construction of scientifically sustainable arguments. We also discussed how to enhance students’ chances of being published in international journals by improving the readability of their texts. The third workshop focused on the special problems encountered by English-as-Foreign-Language users when writing in English, addressing such issues as grammar, lexis, and style. Workshop 4 addressed teachers’ written feedback, and provided the opportunity to ventilate similarities and differences in feedback practices. Concrete examples of teaching strategies that enable the student to assess his/her performance as well as take advantage of teachers’ feedback were also taken up. In workshop 5 a feedback tool known as “Criterion” was discussed. The final workshop addressed teachers’ perceptions of the main problems relating to writing academic texts in academic English both for English majors and for so-called “College students” (students at Chinese universities who write in English but who are not English majors).
There are an increasing number of Chinese students at Swedish universities. Thus, it is essential that Chinese and Swedish teachers understand one another’s academic/writing cultures and the expectations of both the sending and receiving university as regards such issues as classroom interaction, the relationship between teachers and students, the importance of critical thinking and writing as demonstrations of knowledge, assessment procedures, and the special requirements of oral versus written tasks and productions. We are pleased to welcome Chinese students and wish to provide the best possible support both before students arrive and while they are studying within our educational system. It is also our hope that increasing numbers of international students will be able to study in China.

While the focus here is on the teacher’s perspective, the goal is to facilitate not only teacher but also student exchange between our countries. Briefly, the first section, “Practical Information,” relates to basic information that Chinese teachers should give students before arriving at a Swedish university. The second section, “Oral interaction in the cross-cultural classroom,” focuses on information of special use to teachers receiving Chinese and other international students; this section highlights important cultural differences that influence academic performance. The third and final section, “Writing in the cross-cultural classroom”, identifies some problem areas within the field of academic writing that are particularly relevant for the Chinese learner.¹

¹ Along with Chan and Rao (2010) we emphasise that it “is not helpful to focus on a binary distinction between Chinese and Western students, as this may lead to the polarization of learners, or to a comparison between one kind of learner and another, as if there were an ‘ideal’ type of student” (318). The Chinese learner denotes a learner in a Confucian-heritage culture, but it is important to remember that “students vary across national and regional boundaries and socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g. urban versus rural settings), and this may influence how they approach task demands and learning situations” (ibid.).
I. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

There are several important administrative and practical issues that are best explained to students before they arrive at the host university since international students generally arrive before local ones and routines and procedures may not be self-apparent. It should be noted that there is a limited number of administrative personnel on duty during the summer although students can always turn to the International Office for advice and assistance. A number of the most important administrative and practical issues are identified below.

Students should ensure that they are formally registered on their elected course. This should be done at least one week before the course begins. Different universities have different systems. Registration information is normally available on the university’s homepage and should be consulted before the student leaves the home country to ensure that all necessary paperwork has been completed and all documents are in order (these include a formal acceptance from the host university and an up-to-date visa that covers the full period of study).

Once students are registered they will be allocated an e-mail address. This should be used at all times; the use of private addresses is discouraged as they may cause confusion and may even be rejected by the university server. When writing e-mails, students should fill in the subject line to indicate the content of the mail. It is never acceptable to send documents without a proper message or explanation in the body of the mail. Students should pay attention to their English: the language should be grammatically correct and the tone polite. Each new point should be in a separate paragraph. Important questions should either be underlined or highlighted in a different colour to ensure that they are not missed by the teacher.

After registering, students need to obtain a personal entry card that admits them to the teaching buildings. This also enables them to enter the buildings at the weekend or in the evenings. Students may normally use the university premises for self-study. The library, however, is only open at specific times.

Students should also go as soon as possible to the university library to obtain a membership card entitling them to borrow books, browse magazines and use the library photocopying services. It should be noted that course books should normally be purchased and not copied. There are a limited number of course books available at the library; it is also advisable to make concise notes and/or note questions in one’s own book in preparation for class discussions and to identify important material for assignments.
Where a book is required reading, i.e. is stipulated on the reading list, it should not only be purchased (or borrowed) but also brought to class for each session. Notes may not be made in borrowed books.

It should be stressed that Swedish universities have very strict copyright laws: it is not permitted to copy whole books. Copyright laws are normally displayed next to photocopiers and are always available from librarians on request.

Students must be punctual: being late for class or an appointment is not acceptable and is regarded as both nonchalant and rude.

Finally, students have a personal homepage on which they can see their results. They should be encouraged to consult this page first and not to contact the teacher immediately if they are concerned about the registration of a grade.

**RELATIONS BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS**

In Swedish universities, the relations between teaching staff and students are relatively non-hierarchical. At Kristianstad University, for example, relations are informal. It is normal for a student to address his/her teacher using the latter’s Christian name only. This is not a sign of disrespect; rather, it is a reflection of relaxed relations between the two based on mutual respect.

It should be noted that teachers and supervisors have limited access hours. Students may contact their teacher for a meeting or tutor (this is best done by e-mail); turning up unannounced at a teacher’s office is unlikely to result in a satisfactory meeting for either the student or the teacher. It is helpful if the student specifies what is to be discussed; he/she should send any relevant documentation in advance. Students should always be punctual for appointments: the teacher’s time is limited and must be allocated evenly to all students: if a student is late for an appointment, the time cannot be made up as it will encroach on the next student’s appointment. It should also be noted that in Swedish – and indeed in many foreign universities – teachers do not normally work in the evening or at weekends.

There are some important differences in the role of the supervisor/teacher in China and in other universities, including Sweden. These relate, for example, to the degree of hierarchy in the student/teacher relationship, and the degree of accessibility of and support from the supervisor. Such differences should be explained to the student both before leaving China and at the beginning of the supervision process at the host university in order to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment. This is an important issue that has been raised by other researchers and does not need to be highlighted here. As Chan and Rao, for example, point out, “although both Chinese and Western teachers feel that they have to promote academic development, Chinese teachers believe that
they are also responsible for ‘cultivating students’ and promoting development in non-academic areas. Chinese teachers regard teaching and learning as being more holistic than their Western counterparts, and see themselves as ‘moral educators’ who help students to understand their roles in society” (Chan & Rao, 2010, pp. 9-10). The chief concern of a Swedish supervisor is that students fulfil the relevant criteria as stipulated in the syllabus.

**ASSESSMENT**

Admission to a course or programme and/or attendance in class does not guarantee that students will be awarded a certificate. Only when all the examinations have been passed will a student be awarded either a pass or a distinction grade. Students should be informed that it is their responsibility to check the course requirements and criteria and ensure that they fulfil these. At Kristianstad University, these can be found on the “It’s Learning” platform for each course and programme.

Students should understand that in Sweden there is much less reliance on end-of-term or end-of-year examinations than in their own country or in Great Britain, for example. Chinese students may need additional support at the beginning of their course or programme when writing critical assignments that involve independent thinking; the emphasis on rote learning in China and on producing correct and complete answers
as opposed to discussing possible ideas and interpretations needs to be identified as a potential problem (cf. Su et al., 1994; Xiao and Dyson, 1999). The different forms of examination at Swedish and other foreign universities need to be explained, including take-home examinations, individual or joint reports, oral presentations etc.

At Kristianstad University, students are normally given three opportunities to take an examination, i.e. two re-take examinations following the original written examination (if this received a fail grade). Irrespective of whether the student turns up for an examination in an examination hall or submits a manuscript as part of a take-home assignment, the first time the examination is offered counts as the first examination opportunity. If they pass (or gain a distinction grade) on the first occasion, they do not revise. If they fail, on the other hand, they are given two more opportunities to pass. It is not possible for a student to raise a “pass” grade to distinction.

It should be noted that students do not have the right to contest their grade but they may question the form of examination. It is very important that students understand what is required of them both in class, in sub-assignments (where these are given) and in the final assignment/examination. If they do not understand, it is imperative that they ask their teacher in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Teachers welcome questions and opportunities to clarify: in international universities it is not a sign of disrespect to ask questions. Further details regarding classroom interaction are discussed below, in section II.

ATTITUDES TO SOURCE MANAGEMENT. THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE AND PLAGIARISM

As discussed below, in the section on writing, students are expected to consult and quote from primary sources (the main text/s, e.g. a novel or a report) and secondary sources (texts about the primary source including contextual and/or critical material). This is a pre-condition for academic validity; the student must be able to demonstrate that he/she has consulted relevant sources, situated his/her research in a wider research context, and demonstrated his/her contribution to the field. It is essential that the student distinguishes between another writer’s opinions/research and his/her own. While quoting should always be kept to a minimum, as it is the writer’s voice that the reader wishes to hear, it is important to include carefully selected, short quotations to substantiate a point. All quotations should be a) in inverted commas, b) properly referenced in accordance with the relevant style sheet and c) properly introduced and discussed. Failure to provide quotation marks where a word, sentence or more than one sentence has been quoted directly from the original text is regarded as plagiarism. This serious and punishable offence may result in the student being expelled or subjected to other disciplinary measures.
It is an important part of a student’s identity and learning to demonstrate ethical management of primary and secondary sources. In Swedish and other foreign universities, it is *never* acceptable to insert words, sentences or sections from another text without acknowledging these properly both in the main text and in the references.

At Kristianstad University, we require that our students submit their completed texts to a text analysis programme known as *Urkund* that compares the student’s text with other texts on the same subject. A score is provided that is based on the extent to which the student has utilised other sources. Any section that is identical with that of another text is identified (this is to be expected, of course, where the excerpt is a direct quotation). Students are informed about how the *Urkund* programme works and the consequences of unethical source management.

**GIFTS**

While China has a gift-giving culture, this is not common in Sweden or other European countries. It is not usual for students to give their teacher a gift; there is indeed a risk that a gift may be interpreted as an attempt to gain preference. Students should be advised not to give gifts to their teachers even if the latter appreciate their students’ generosity and thoughtfulness.
II. ORAL INTERACTION IN THE CROSS-CULTURAL CLASSROOM

Chinese students who plan to study abroad need to know that in Sweden, as well as in many other countries such as Australia, the USA and the UK, universities are required to provide students with generic skills or generic graduate attributes, such as communication and critical thinking skills. Communication, written as well as oral, is a prescribed attribute in university policy documents. In Sweden, oral activities such as classroom discussions, group discussions, role-plays, asking questions, and more or less formal presentations – individual or in group - are common activities. Furthermore, when studying English at school, Swedish students are encouraged to participate in a variety of oral tasks. The focus when it comes to grading in the Swedish school system (not Higher Education) is on students’ willingness to communicate and strategies for solving a task rather than on linguistic accuracy. This is thus the kind of attitude and oral proficiency expected from students entering Higher Education in Sweden.

The oral activities mentioned above may present problems for Asian students for a number of reasons. One main problem is lack of language skills but also lack of practice: they do not know, for example, what to do or how to act when they are asked to form groups and discuss in class. In addition, Swedish teachers may become frustrated when they realise that they cannot achieve the same level of activity in the classroom as with Swedish students. This section will discuss interaction in the classroom in Sweden, and give some hints about what to do to activate students and facilitate interaction.
BACKGROUND

In some cultures such as the Chinese, oral activities are given less high priority than in the Swedish educational system. Students may thus be reluctant to give presentations and may need formal tuition as well as practice in interacting with an audience. Students who persistently fail to contribute to class discussions need to be identified; and where oral interaction is a requirement, they must be made aware of the consequences of failure to participate.

It should be remembered that teaching in China is often more authoritarian and teacher-centred than in Sweden, and student-centred activities such as discussions or inquiry-based learning are not common. Research from 2013 shows that the lecture is still the most common classroom activity in Higher Education; 93% of the Chinese students taking part in the study never prepare for class or even discuss course content with their peers after class (73%) (Yin, Lu & Wang, 2013). In addition, various techniques used to develop generic graduate attributes (oral communication skills) such as small-group discussions, presentations and group work are rarely used in China (Xiao & Dyson, 1999). As a result, incoming students need to be informed about and practise listening to others and making comments in class.

WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Firstly, in Sweden it is considered impolite to talk when either the teacher is talking or when fellow students are asking questions or giving a short presentation. It is also regarded as impolite to yawn as this suggests boredom and is a sign of disrespect. Students need to understand this in order to avoid embarrassment and misunderstandings.

Secondly, at the beginning of a course it may be necessary to introduce interactive activities to encourage some students to speak and ask questions. It takes time to develop both general oral skills and specific communication skills in a foreign language. In China, the teacher is the primary source of knowledge and students are not encouraged to ask questions (Bailey, 2005). They are often regarded as too busy to be interrupted; they must cover a large amount of material during the session, and interruptions may be regarded as disruptive (Su et al., 1994; Gao & Watkins, 2001). In Sweden, however, because lecturing is kept to a minimum, and interactive methods such as group discussions and presentations are employed in the classroom, students must come to class well-prepared, are expected to make comments and ask when something is not clear: no question is too stupid or obvious! Thus, students should be told that asking questions is not a mark of disrespect (students may believe, for example, that a question is an indirect criticism of the teacher’s ability to communicate; see Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; and Xiao & Dyson, 1999) but an indication of engagement and commitment. In China, students will often wait until the end of the lecture before...
asking questions. In Sweden, most teachers welcome questions throughout the session because they indicate interest, engagement and are helpful in identifying actual or potential problems.

Thirdly, independent, critical thinking is the primary focus of Swedish education. Students should thus be aware that they will be encouraged – indeed, expected – to question facts and teachers’ statements as well as adopt a critical attitude to what is discussed both in class and in the course literature. As a result, students must know that they are expected to be active in class, ask questions, make comments and generally contribute to a dialogue between teacher and students, and students and students. As already established, students should know that if they do not participate in class discussions they may be regarded as passive, uninterested, and/or unprepared.

**COMMON UNDERLYING PROBLEMS**

Among the Chinese teachers we met at our workshops at Beijing Normal University in June 2014 it was pointed out that the students’ lack of interest, lack of understanding of how to organise and present their thoughts according to European or non-Chinese logic, and the difference between English and Chinese as languages, are significant barriers to effective communication in both writing and speaking. Another study indicates that it can be difficult for Chinese students to grasp the logic of dynamic and creative activities (Rao, 2002), confirming the view of the teachers at Beijing Normal University. One reason for the difficulty may be that Chinese students of English are used to focusing on non-communicative activities since many tests they take throughout compulsory school are based on grammar. Indeed, students feel that they have not learned anything if a lesson does not cover vocabulary or grammar (Rao, 2002).

Another problem for students is that their less developed language skills have a negative impact on their interaction with teachers and peers. This problem can be related not only to poor language skills but also to the Chinese concern with “losing face”, where students attempt to keep their dignity by simply refraining from speaking. For the teacher it may be difficult to determine if lack of participation is due to cultural issues or to inadequate subject knowledge and/or language problems (McLean et al., 2011).

**WHAT THEN CAN BE DONE?**

It is important to remember that it takes time to develop oral skills and that these are best taught through practice based on realistic situations and over a long period of time (Kelly, 2007). Oral skills as a generic graduate attribute are also best taught “embedded”, i.e. in the context of the program (cf. Oliver, 2013; Bath et al., 2004). This means that it is better to incorporate various oral activities every time students are in class, in all courses and throughout a program, rather than having one separate course
on public speaking. Students should also be properly prepared for the task; they should be made aware of what is expected of them and be given increasingly demanding tasks. Immediate feedback from peers and the teacher on what to improve facilitates scholarly development. Video recording presentations followed by discussions of strong and weak points is another useful tool (Kelly, 2007). Either the students can film themselves or each other outside of class using their phones/tablets/computers or the teacher can use a proper video camera to film class presentations.

It is also advisable to split up students of the same nationality in order that they may gain new insights and practise their English. It is tempting to remain within the Chinese group, and this happens, but we very much hope that our Chinese students will mix with other students, thereby gaining new friends and new insights.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Below follows an example of how oral communication tasks were incorporated in a course on International Business and Multinational Enterprises. There were 10 different nationalities in the class, mainly European, but also some Asian students. The class was taught over a five-week period. During the first week, the students were divided into groups of 3-4 with the aim of having at least three different nationalities in as many of the groups as possible. In the very first week they were given an assignment where they were asked to discuss their cultures, differences and similarities in relation to International Business theories and models presented in the textbook, and prepare a short paper to hand in for assessment. On the Friday of the first week they came to class and presented/discussed their findings with another group. This is a low-stake, fun start, where the students learn to know each other better but also discuss cultural differences and theories in relation to different cultures.
In the second week, the students were asked to write an individual essay on a company of their choice. Before the final deadline there was an essay seminar, where the students read and discussed each other’s papers. As a result, all students spoke English in the second week and discussed the content of the course, but the teachers did not grade the students’ performance. This approach, involving a second low-stake oral activity, took the focus off language proficiency and opened up for easier communication. Students also reported that they felt they had improved their English proficiency during the course.

The following week the students prepared a more formal group presentation where they were required to present a framework with which to analyse multinational companies. Again, the task involved group work and discussion, but this time the presentation was graded not only in terms of content but also on how well it was delivered. The students were issued with written instructions and discussed how to organise as well as deliver an effective presentation. After the presentations, the students were asked to give feedback to each other both on the content as well as the delivery of the presentation. Week four involved a workshop, where the students solved a task in pairs, involving discussing and explaining which strategy they had chosen when solving the task. The students worked with a peer of a different gender and nationality. In the final week, students read a scientific article of their choice and prepared a brief presentation. They were asked to explain the article to a small group of students. The teacher also took part but sat outside the group of students, listening to the presentations and following discussion. The presentation and group discussion were part of the final grade. The activities are summarised in table 1 on the following page.
**TABLE 1 ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE ORAL SKILLS IN A FIVE-WEEK COURSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Oral activities involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Group project: compare culture</td>
<td>Present own culture/experience in new culture to your own group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss with group what to write in the report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present group report to another group and discuss similarities and differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individual essay: competitive advantages</td>
<td>Present your own report to another student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss another student’s report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss how to improve own report but also your peer’s report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group project: Analysis of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)</td>
<td>Discuss in own group what cases to use and how to build a model/what to include in the report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practise delivery of presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formal presentation (all must take part)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some will speak in class and give feedback to other groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Discuss (in pairs) choice of strategy used when solving a task together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Individual Mini-lecture of scientific article</td>
<td>Present your own text to peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss and compare the texts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above is a brief account of how to incorporate oral communication into a business course. The course design maximises the possibility for students to communicate in English without taking time away from the main content, i.e. International Business theories and models. Filming the students and/or using more experienced-based learning such as role-plays would have extended the opportunities for the students to improve their oral communication skills still further. Group work can be useful for learning and reduces the marking workload for teachers, but it can also be a problem for students, especially if they are not used to working in groups. The following section discusses how to facilitate group work in the classroom.

The University of Pittsburgh offers useful teaching tips on how to work with oral communication in the classroom giving examples from different disciplines (University of Pittsburgh, 2008). For further insights into the difference between Chinese and Western class interaction, see Hong Xiao and Elena Petraki, “An investigation of Chinese students’ difficulties in intercultural communication and its role in ELT” (2007).
FACILITATING GROUP WORK

To work in groups or teams is another generic graduate attribute that prepares students for future employment. In the workplace, students may have to work in groups; others may determine the composition of such groups. There are many advantages with group work from a learning point of view as students practise, for example, team work, critical thinking and time management skills. The method also saves marking time for instructors as the number of papers to be graded and presentations to be listened to is reduced. Students are often reluctant to work in groups due to so-called “free riders”, that is students who do not do their fair share of the work load (Natoli et al., 2014; Ballantine & McCourt Larres, 2007).

How then can group work be facilitated? A study of a group of finance students showed that students who received support during group work were more satisfied with the group-work process and experienced higher levels of skill development than students who did not receive group-work support (Natoli et al., 2014). Another study, which confirms that supported group work leads to improved generic skills development, demonstrates that success depends on the teacher spending time on forming groups, acting as a facilitator during the process, and ensuring that free-riding is minimised (Ballantine & McCourt Larres, 2007).

Group work is facilitated if the teacher takes the responsibility for forming the groups. These should ideally contain 3-4 students. Before forming the groups, it is beneficial to perform team-building activities in class so that the students learn to know each other. In the initial stages, it is helpful to let the students write group contracts, plan the work carefully and hand in project plans with deadlines and allocation of specific tasks distributed among group members. In addition, to avoid free riding, students can hand in reports on their work, where they reflect upon their own contributions as well as those of the other group members. If the project extends for a longer period of time, the students could also be given some time in every class session to report on their progress, problems encountered and how they have solved these (Natoli et al., 2014; UNSW Australia, 2014). To spend extra time on supporting and managing groups is especially beneficial with groups of international students who are not used to group work.

The University of New South Wales offers useful teaching tips on how to facilitate group work in addition to providing many other teaching tips (UNSW Australia, 2014).
III. WRITING IN THE CROSS-CULTURAL CLASSROOM

This section offers some practical advice related to preparing students for different writing tasks at a Swedish or other foreign university.

The teacher often introduces a topic with a short lecture, usually of no more than twenty minutes duration. This is followed by specific exercises and/or class/group discussions. Students must both listen to one another and contribute actively to discussions.

Before entering a Swedish university, it is a good idea for students to read articles and reports in English that are related to their specific subject in order to acquaint themselves with the terminology and style of academic texts within their particular field. Students should continue to read journal articles and reports in English to promote vocabulary and language competence. A range of newspapers and journals is generally available at university libraries.

Two basic skills that students need to practise before entering a Swedish or foreign university are note-taking and writing summaries. Following is some advice as well as useful electronic references.
NOTE-TAKING

Students should always take notes in class and compare these with fellow students after class to ensure that the most important points have been noted. Ideally, notes should be kept in a special folder on the student’s computer or in a notebook kept for the purpose. Notes should also include questions that the student wishes to raise in class. Where the student has purchased his/her own copy of the course book, hand-written notes can be added to the margins. Students should be encouraged to include the relevant page reference(s) to save time later.

Useful websites providing examples of different kinds of notes include Dartmouth College (2014), University of Reading (2014) and University of Leicester (2014).

WRITING SUMMARIES

When asked to read certain chapters or whole texts, students may be asked to write a summary of the main observations/findings. This will jog their memory and also establish if they have understood the text. Before entering a foreign university, students should be given practice in comparing their own summary with those of other students.

When planning a summary, it is advisable to write a plan of the elements in the original text, following the points below:

- The writer’s subject, summarised in one or two sentences
- The writer’s topic, summarised in one or two sentences
- The writer’s position, summarised in one sentence
- The writer’s argument, summarised in your own words as far as possible
- The writer’s main points, summarised in complete sentences
- The writer’s conclusions, summarised in one or two sentences

The centre for writing studies at University of Illinois (2013) offers useful tips on writing summaries.

WRITING ACTIVITIES: FIVE KEY ISSUES

Before entering a foreign university, students may need practice in writing summaries, reports and essays/theses. Clarity and effectiveness are crucial in all types of written texts, as is the use of grammatically correct English that is appropriate to the particular situation and the purpose for which the text has been written. Students should be reminded that academic English is not the same as general English or the English that is spoken on the street or on television: it has its own conventions, and these need to be learned. This takes time and effort. Reading well-written essays and articles is an
excellent way to become acquainted with the conventions of academic English. More detailed information about structuring and writing assignments follows below.

In the following a number of specific areas are presented where the writers have found differences between Chinese and Swedish students; some of these were identified in our workshops in May and June. By highlighting these differences, we hope to make the process of adapting to a Swedish or other foreign university easier for Chinese students as well as their teachers. We begin by identifying one key issue at a time. These are listed as (1) – (5), and are followed by suggestions as to how to approach each difficulty.

(1) STUDENTS’ LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH THE TYPICAL STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH PAPERS WITHIN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES.

Firstly, students need to be informed that most academic papers they will be asked to write at Kristianstad University and other foreign universities will follow the so-called IMRAD structure, with which they may or may not be familiar. The IMRAD paper should include the following sections in the following order: Introduction, Methods/Materials, Results And Discussion. IMRAD is a common format for academic research papers, primarily physics and biology, but it is also widely used in the social and behavioural sciences. Research in the Humanities normally uses a style which is similar to IMRAD, in the sense that academic research in all fields follows common explication principles. However, the focus in Humanities research is more on
readability and the clarification of nuances in the topic, where there is a less-distinct separation of topic explication and exact data collection procedures.

It is important to explain to students that the purpose of an IMRAD paper is to show whether or not a set of data supports – or does not support – an idea or opinion that is formed into a “hypothesis.” A “hypothesis” (sometimes the terms “aim,” “thesis statement,” or “research question” will be used instead) is a scientific question formed as a tentative statement; it is an idea that has not yet been proven or supported by accurate data.

The following brief account of what the various sections of the IMRAD paper should include can be used to familiarise students with this format:
Introduction:

The introduction explains why the study was undertaken and what it is about. The research question, the tested hypothesis, or the purpose of the research is explained and its potential interest demonstrated. The introduction, which is generally one to three paragraphs long, should make the reader interested in the topic. It could also include some brief general comments on the topic.

Methods/Materials

This section explains when, where, and how the study was carried out. The writer explains what materials were used, or who was included in the study groups (patients, etc.). Note that it is very important to find relevant sources that provide support for the choice of method and material. The study needs to be put in the context of previous research; this can be done in the Method/Materials section, or sometimes in a separate Literature review.

Results

In this section, the results of the study are described: what answer was found to the research question; was the tested hypothesis true? This includes a well-structured, clear and systematic analysis of the results, which is clearly linked to the research question. The results and analysis should be discussed in connection with relevant secondary sources, and with a clear reference to the individual results of the study. This is the main section of the paper.

Discussion

This part includes a discussion of what the results might imply and why they are significant. The discussion should also address how the results fit in with what other researchers have found, and provide some suggestions for future research.

Finally, there needs to be a Conclusion that adds a sense of completion to the paper. It is appropriate to refer to the introductory paragraph, either with the aid of key words or parallel concepts and images. Avoid ending with a rephrased thesis statement that contains no substantive changes; or introducing a new idea or subtopic; or focusing on a minor point in the essay.

As the IMRAD structure described above indicates, most foreign universities focus on analysis (as opposed to description) using models or theories. Great emphasis is placed on independent critical thinking. As pointed out by the teachers participating in our Beijing workshop, this is not always the case in China, where traditions are different.

One way to approach differences in our traditions is to address the contrast between inductive and deductive reasoning. Because Chinese students are often taught inductive reasoning, they may not be familiar with deductive reasoning. Briefly, inductive reasoning, or induction, is reasoning from a specific case or cases to derive
a general rule. It draws inferences from observations in order to make generalisations. Conclusions may be drawn by appeal to evidence, authority or causal relationships.

Deductive reasoning, or *deduction*, on the other hand, starts with a general case and deduces specific instances. The deductive reasoning of an academic essay consists of a series of syllogisms that support a thesis. A syllogism is a unit of reasoning that consists of two claims that support a third claim. The major premise states a general concept. The minor premise is a specific instance of that concept. The conclusion connects the specific instance to the general concept:

Major premise: All men are mortal.
Minor premise: Socrates is a man.
Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

Note that in an argumentative essay, parts of syllogisms are usually left unstated (“Socrates is mortal because he is a man”). In addition, deductive arguments often give explicit reasons for and against the conclusion; the writer has to consider the pros and cons of the matter discussed.

Read more in Kelley Griffith (2014), *Writing Essays About Literature*.

**(2) STUDENT ESSAYS ARE FOCUSED ON LESS RELEVANT ISSUES**

China is a high-context culture, which means that great emphasis is placed on the background of the issue that is being discussed instead of the argument. As a result, students may produce essays that to a Swedish teacher appear to focus on less relevant issues, or perhaps even seem to lack focus. There is a clash of academic traditions here as “Asian cultural and educational systems emphasize a view of knowledge as that which should be conserved and reproduced, in contrast with Western systems, which emphasize a more speculative, questioning approach” (Kirby, Woodhouse & Ma, 1996, p. 142). When it comes to student essays, it needs to be stressed that what is important is to put the issue one is writing about in the context of a broader field of research, and to come up with a persuasive and original argument. In the introduction to the essay, “students should set the context by reviewing the topic in a general way. Next, the author should explain why the topic is important […] or why readers should care about the issue. Lastly, students should present the thesis statement” (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2014). The context is thus briefly addressed in the Introduction, and then developed in relation to *Method/Materials* or in a separate section, the *Literature review*, in which relevant previous research is discussed.

The *thesis statement* explains the argument and includes the research question and a brief description of how the student will answer the question. Usually, the thesis statement (as established earlier, this is sometimes referred to as “aim”, hypothesis,” or “research question”) is found in the introduction. The following paragraphs (the body
of the text) must relate to this central idea and contribute to the reader’s understanding of the topic.

In argumentative as well as expository essays, all claims should be supported by facts and reasoning. Therefore, extreme subjectivity needs to be avoided: a writer who uses phrases like *I think…, I believe…*, etc., risks sounding opinionated. In addition, overuse of “I” makes the essay sound too informal/colloquial.

A related issue is that of handling sources and references, which is addressed in the following section.

**(3) STUDENTS DO NOT KNOW WHAT PLAGIARISM IS AND MAY COPY/PASTE LARGE CHUNKS OF TEXT WITHOUT PROPER REFERENCING.**

Plagiarism appears to be a growing problem in Swedish as well as foreign universities. Proper source management is an academic skill that needs to be taught along with other aspects of writing. This includes, for example, being taught how to summarise and re-write source material in one’s own words. Another problem area is quotations that are stacked, that is, listed one after the other without proper analysis. There needs to be a balance between quotations from primary/secondary sources and the student’s own analysis. As indicated above, independent thinking and originality are highly prized in the western academic writing tradition. Consequently, quotations are only useful if the writer clearly shows how they apply to her/his own study. Quotations must never be left stranded in the text, without comment.

Carol Bailey (2005), when writing about Chinese students at UK universities, explains that “students writing an undergraduate dissertation in China are advised (but not required) to state their sources at the end of the dissertation; however they are not required (or taught) to use quotation marks, paraphrase and in-text referencing within the body of their work. For an undergraduate essay, no form of referencing is required at all” (p. 11). She goes on to describe how in China, even textbooks and scholarly articles may lack referencing, so it not surprising that this difference between academic practices creates difficulties for Chinese students. Bailey (2005) concludes that “the misapplication or transgression of ‘western’ academic writing conventions is the single greatest cause of failure by Chinese students at my university [University of Wolverhampton]”.

Diane Pecorari (2013) questions the explanation of plagiarism in terms of cultural differences. Instead, she suggests that international students are, in fact, very similar to home students in that they find academic language and conventions difficult to master, but because English is not their native language “they have further to go to close the gap between their current skills and those they need to develop” (p. 114). She suggests that teachers must recognise international students’ need for clear explanations and
illustrations of what plagiarism means, and how it is handled at their university. Some of the ways in which teachers can support international students in their attempt to handle sources include reading academic texts, reformulating ideas from them, using reporting verbs, and providing opportunities for practice, feedback and revision. It is also important that teachers are open to the possibility that “plagiarism can have non-deceptive causes” and are willing “to extend the presumption of innocence” to their students (Pecorari, 2013, p. 115.)

Read more in Diane Pecorari, *Teaching to Avoid Plagiarism* (2013).

*(4) STUDENT ESSAYS THAT ARE NOT WRITTEN IN CORRECT, ACADEMIC ENGLISH.*

Our results suggest that special attention needs to be paid to cohesive devices, paragraph divisions, topic sentences, punctuation, and the use of the definite/indefinite article. As noted above, students must be made aware that academic English is different from spoken, everyday English. As Kirby *et al.* (1996) argue, the academic context can be thought of as “a second – and even third—culture, with language as one of its central features” (p. 143). They go on to describe academic discourse as “information focused” and “decontextualised”, which means that “information is expressed in isolation from supporting cues in the environment, using complex syntactic structures and specialized vocabulary” (*ibid.*, p. 143). This means that specialised language skills are needed to understand and produce academic texts. Argumentative or expository texts are unlike narratives in that they rely on certain rhetorical structures that convey the logical sequence of events. For example, *cohesive devices* and transitional words are used to create fluency in an academic text. Following is a brief sample list of words that can be used to create coherence between sentences and paragraphs and serve to introduce contrast, illustration, extension, conclusion, or indicate the next step of the investigation:

- **Contrast**: But, However, On the other hand, Yet
- **Illustration**: For example, That is
- **Extension**: In addition, By extension, What is more
- **Conclusion**: Therefore, Consequently, As a result, Thus
- **Indicating the next step**: Then, After that, It follows


Furthermore, it should also be noted that students must be aware of the differences between British and American English; they need to choose one variety and be consistent in their use of it. The grammar and spellchecker on the computer solve many problems, but students should know that they are not always correct. One example is where the subject of a sentence is a collective noun.
To return briefly to our workshops, the tendency among Chinese students to overuse clichés (“every coin has two sides”; “a double-edged sword”) and propaganda phrases was identified. It needs to be pointed out that academic style does not mean using unusual words, figurative language, or long, complicated sentences. It is desirable to produce precise, clear and neutral descriptions rather than emotional or moralistic language.

Another common problem identified in our workshops was the lack of clear *topic sentences*. Topic sentences express the main point in a paragraph. Paragraphs are unified around a main point; all sentences in the paragraph should clearly relate to that point in some way. The paragraph’s main idea should be supported by specific information that develops or discusses the main idea in greater detail.
Reasons for beginning a new paragraph are to:

- Show you are switching to a new idea
- Highlight an important point by putting it at the beginning or end of your paragraph
- Show a change in time or place
- Emphasise a contrast
- Indicate changing speakers in a dialogue
- Give readers an opportunity to pause
- Break up a dense text

One may create a topic sentence by considering the details or examples to be discussed. What unifies these examples? What do my examples have in common? The writer should reach a conclusion and write that “conclusion” first. If it helps, one might write backwards – from generalisation to support instead of from examples to a conclusion.

Purposes of topic sentences. To:

- State the main point of a paragraph
- Give the reader a sense of direction (indicate what information will follow)
- Summarise the paragraph’s main point

Some examples of topic sentences:

The aim of this study is to investigate whether … (The aim is then described in the paragraph)

This subsection introduces the theoretical background of the present study…(The paragraph summarises the theory in question)
Lt. Henry is a callous man…(The paragraph then accounts for why the writer has reached this conclusion, including examples of Henry’s actions, thoughts or speech)

As written Chinese does not use punctuation marks, punctuation in English can present problems for a Chinese learner. A basic description of how to use (the most common) punctuation marks is presented in the following.

**THE COMMA**

Use commas when making a list:

> Snow White wished that Dopey, Sneezey, Grumpy, Bashful, Sleepy, Happy and Doc would grow up.

Use a comma when joining sentences with *and, or, but, yet, while*:

- The moon is bright tonight, and it will stay bright tomorrow.
- The moon is bright tonight, but tomorrow it will be dull.
- The sea is calm tonight, yet it has rained all day.
- The car crashed there, or it may have been here.
- The British are good at eating, while the French are good at cooking.

Do not use a comma before a defining relative clause:

> Each constituency sends the person who gets the most votes to Westminster.

Do use a comma before a non-defining relative clause:

> The prime minister, who is over seventy, still plays squash every day.

A comma is used before *which*, when it means something like *and this*:

> Many Swedes seem unable or unwilling to store alcohol in their homes, which means that there are long queues at the “systembolaget” (State-run off-licence) on Friday afternoons.

A comma is not used before *that*:

> The president admitted that he knew the woman reasonably well.

Commas are used to separate sentence adverbs from the rest of the sentence:

> However, this is only the first in a series of disasters.

Read more about punctuation in Lynne Truss (2003), *Eats, Shoots and Leaves.*
THE COLON

Strunk and White (1959) explain the function of the colon in the following way: “A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding phrase. The colon has more effect than the comma, less power to separate than the semicolon, and more formality than the dash” (ibid. p. 7-8). The colon usually follows an independent clause and is used to add information to or modify the preceding sentence. Colons can introduce a list, an explanation, or a quotation. A colon “should not separate a verb from its complement or a preposition from its object” (ibid., 1959, p. 8). The useful online Guide to Grammar and Writing (Capital Community College, 2014) suggests that one may think of the colon as a gate inviting one to go on, as in the example below:

There is only one thing left to do now: confess while you still have time.

As is seen in the above example, the two parts of the sentence are closely linked so that one often has a sense of what is going to be on the other side of the colon.

THE SEMI-COLON

The semi-colon is used in very long lists such as the following:

There were citizens from Bangor, Maine; Hartford, Connecticut; Boston, Massachusetts; and Newport, Rhode Island.

Semi-colons are also used to separate closely related independent clauses:

My grandmother seldom goes to bed this early; she’s afraid she’ll miss out on something.

The semi-colon allows the writer to imply a relationship between subtly balanced ideas without actually stating that relationship: instead of saying because my grandmother is afraid she’ll miss out on something, the because is implied. Thus the reader is involved in the development of an idea, which is a clever way of engaging her/his attention (see Capital Community College, 2014).

THE RUN-ON SENTENCE/COMMA SPLICE

Run-on sentences are sentences that should have been separated by a punctuation mark but are not. The grammar checker does not always identify run-on sentences, so it is a good idea to address this problem before a writing task is handed out to students. The comma-splice is a very common example of a run-on sentence and occurs when a comma is used to connect two independent clauses:

Jim usually gets on with everybody, he is an understanding person.
If two independent clauses need to be separated, as in the example above, there are several choices:

- You can make them into two sentences using a full-stop.
  
  Jim usually gets on with everybody. He is an understanding person.

You can use a semi-colon.

  Jim usually gets on with everybody; he is an understanding person.

You can introduce a conjunction to connect the sentences. By doing this, you make the connection between the two more explicit.

- Jim usually gets on with everybody because he is an understanding person.
- Jim usually gets on with everybody, as he is an understanding person.

Read more at University of Bristol (2014).

THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe is used to indicate the following (all examples taken from Truss, 2003 pp. 40 – 45):

- A possessive in a singular noun: The boy’s hat
- Time or quantity: in one week’s time
- The omission of figures in dates: the summer of ’68
- The omission of letters: It’s your turn (it is your turn) NB! “its” is the possessive form
- Strange, non-standard English: “Appen yer’d better ‘ave this key…”
- The plurals of letters and words: Are there too many but’s and and’s at the beginnings of sentences these days?
- The apostrophe is also used in certain proper names, particularly Irish names, such as O’Neill and O’Casey.

ARTICLES

English has two articles: the (=the definite article) and a/an (the indefinite article), which are used to modify nouns. The is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; a/an is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. The use of articles may be difficult for learners of English as a foreign language, particularly if the student’s native language does not have articles, as in Chinese. In our experience, this is a major difficulty for Chinese students writing in English.
Some brief examples from student papers are presented to illustrate the difficulties of using the definite/indefinite articles in English. Students who find it difficult to understand how to use the articles in English should consult an English grammar book, such as H. Hasselgård, S. Johansson, & P. Lysvåg, P. (1998), *English Grammar: Theory and Use*, or D. Biber, S. Conrad, G. Leech (2002), *Longman’s Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* in addition to the online sources listed in the list of references below. Other useful handbooks are Diane Hacker and Nancy Sommers (2011): *A Writer’s Reference*, and (2010): *Exercises for A Writer’s Reference Compact Format*.

**EXAMPLE 1**

The definite article is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular. For example:

Student group consists of twelve participants and teacher group consists of ten participants.

In this case, the article *the* should be used to signal that the noun is definite, that it refers to a particular member of a group:

*The* student group consists of twelve participants and *the* teacher group consists of ten participants.

**EXAMPLE 2**

Do *not* use the definite article before a non-specific noun:

The mother receives the mail from him.

There are a number of things that need to be pointed out as regards the use of the definite article in this sentence. If the “mother” that is being referred to is the speaker’s/writer’s own mother, no article would be needed: “Mother receives mail from him.” However, in the sample sentence, it is the mother of a two specific children in a novel that is being referred to and therefore it is correct to use the definite article: we are referring to a specific mother rather than all mothers. Furthermore, there is a definite article before the noun “mail,” but this is not correct. In this sentence, “mail” has a general meaning (she receives mail from him several times and of several kinds). The article should only be used if the word “mail” is followed by a specification: “The mother received the mail that informed her of his whereabouts.”
EXAMPLE 3

The indefinite article, a/an, can only be used with countable nouns, e.g., with a singular noun to say something about all things of the same kind, as below:

Questionnaire is the most efficient way to get research material from China.

There are two alternatives here:

A questionnaire is the most efficient way to get research material from China.
Questionnaires are the most efficient way to get research material from China.
EXAMPLE 4

Do not use the indefinite article before an uncountable noun, such as “advice” or “proof”:

Krashen offers a good advice.

Instead, write:

Krashen offers good advice.

Read more on Purdue University (2014) and The British Council: Learn English (2014). The latter website also has useful exercises for those who wish to practise the use of the definite/indefinite articles.
Studies have demonstrated that Chinese learners of English make more corrections based on teacher feedback than they do based on peer feedback (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Paulus, 1999). However, Miao, Badger and Zhen (2006, p. 193) found that peer feedback led to a greater degree of “meaning-change revision” whereas teacher feedback revisions take place “at surface level.” They conclude that “teacher-initiated revisions are less successful than peer-initiated revisions, probably because negotiation of meaning during the peer interaction helps to enhance mutual understanding and reduce misinterpretation and miscommunication” (ibid.) Peer feedback thus has an important role to play in the writing classroom.

In addition, peer reviews may have a positive effect on student autonomy. For students in a hierarchical academic system such as that of China, this is a particularly valuable aspect. C. E. Berg (1999) has found that peer feedback may help encourage critical thinking:

The student cannot just take the advice as given and make the change, as is likely when the expert (i.e. teacher) provides feedback. Instead, the student will need to consider the advice from a peer, question its validity, weigh it against his or her own knowledge and ideas, and then make a decision about what, if any, changes to make. (Berg, 1999, p. 232)

As described above, peer reviews are a way of working with text that promotes active engagement and communication; they are used in both Swedish and Chinese universities. However, there are special challenges in cross-cultural groups. According to Allaei and Connor (1990, p.24), “conflict or at the very least, high levels of discomfort may occur in multicultural collaborative peer response groups”. Nelson and Murphy (1992; 1993) and Carson and Nelson (1994) found that students from different cultures had different expectations about basic elements of the group situation such as the roles of the members, the mechanics of the group and politeness strategies similar to the situation described in the previous section on oral activities. While it is essential that the teacher is aware of these challenges, we would still suggest that the rewards of cross-cultural work are greater than the drawbacks; we thus recommend mixing nationalities. If students work in pairs, a simple peer review sheet that clearly states the most important points of the assignment facilitates a well-structured discussion. If the students work in larger groups, see Section II. Facilitating group work for more advice. Teachers may want to consider asking for written feedback in connection with peer reviews. Written peer reviews as a complement to oral discussion not only provide structure but also perform a face-saving function for students who are not used to voicing critique.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The presence of Chinese students at Kristianstad University is an important and much welcomed addition to our development as teachers. Teaching international students in general requires increased cultural knowledge and an understanding of how cultural differences influence students’ perception of academic life and achievement and their overall academic performance both orally and in writing. For the best possible academic and social results, Chinese students need to be made aware of the major differences in our educational systems and academic cultures. Teachers at the receiving university also need to be appraised of the expectations and previous experience of incoming students. Where differences are major in terms of learning styles, academic praxis, assessment and reference management, as is the case between Sweden and China, it is particularly important that we work towards mutual understanding based on mutual respect and a desire to learn together. Indeed, as two researchers of international students have noted, foreign students are “canaries in the coal mine” (Carroll & Ryan, 2006, pp. 9-10). The metaphor harks back to the days when miners carried canaries down coalmines: if the canary suddenly died, it was a sign that poisonous gas was present. As international students point out aspects of our teaching that need extra thought and perhaps even revision, they enable us to improve our teaching practices and alert us to potential problems. As Carroll and Ryan conclude, “By paying attention, we can change conditions to make sure that everyone can thrive in the Higher Education environment. If we improve conditions for international students, we improve them for all learners.” It is for this reason that we hope that our guide will be of use to all teachers receiving Chinese and other foreign students. Our classrooms are increasingly international: while this is a challenge, we should not forget that it is also an enormous privilege.
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